Skelliger Religion

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Priestesses of Freya performing a ritual

Founder (s)

Unknown, probably a historical version of Hemdall

Type

Polytheistic

Classification

Western Coast Religions

Scripture (s)

Pjóðbók Guðanna
Sagas
Eddas
Pjóðbóks

Theology

Dualistic

Region (s)

Skellige Islands
Caingorn and Kovir (cult of Freya only)

Language

Skelliger Jargon
Nordlingaen (continental cult of Freya)

Separated from

Unknown Ancient Human Religion

Separations

Nyrvilen Beliefs
Nordling Religion (cult of Freya)

Followers

Skelligers
Nordlings of Caingorn and Kovir (cult of Freya)

Related religions

Nordling Religion
The **religion of Skellige** is the polytheistic and dualistic religion practiced throughout the archipelago of the same name and one of the oldest recorded belief systems along the western coast of the Old Continent. So ancient, in fact, that some scholars believe it was either brought over from the world humans originally came from, or at the very least, derived from a much older faith. It is a religion, which has both influenced and been influenced by the Nordling faith due to geographic proximity to the mainland. To the point, that some, even considered it a local variant of the Nordling religion.

Liturgical Language

The liturgical language of the islanders is, as expected, Skelliger Jargon. The key difference lies in its written form. Unlike the standard usage of Skelliger Jargon, which is typically written using the modern alphabet imported from the Northern Kingdoms, religious texts continue to be written using the Skelliger Runes. These runes are believed to be the writing system used by the gods themselves.

Religious Hierarchy of the Isles

The religious hierarchy of the Isles is structured as follows, from highest to lowest:

- **Sundmaðr (Channeler):** The equivalent of a Supreme Priest or oracle in other parts of the world. As their name suggests, they are responsible for channeling the will of the gods. They live in isolation and are consulted only by high priests, druids, or the ruling monarch of the Isles. Most Sundmaðr are untrained Sources, whose magical abilities were never discovered by druids or mages early on. The people believe their powers are divine, not magical. Others are just regular people whose minds have been altered—sometimes irreversibly—by ritual psychedelic substances.

- **Hǫfuðprestr / Hǫfuðgyðja (High Priest / High Priestess):** High-ranking priests devoted to a specific deity. They oversee all aspects of worship and temple activities. A well-known example is the Hǫfuðgyðja of the temple of Freyja on the island of Hindarsfjall. Only those of extreme devotion—bordering on fanaticism—may someday ascend to the role of Sundmaðr upon the death of their predecessor.
- **Merktr (The Marked):** This title is granted to priests who display exceptional devotion. It can also be given as an honorary title to devout laypeople, allowing them to skip several steps in the path to priesthood should they choose to pursue it. When higher-ranking clergy are absent, the Merktr may lead temple rituals. However, their usual role is that of itinerant faith-consultants, wandering between the Isles, and occasionally acting as missionaries. A famous example: the Merktr who introduced the cult of Freyja to the Northern Kingdoms.
- **Tryggr (The Faithful):** The standard priest. Depending on the island and the deity, they may also be known as Tryggr Bróðir ("Faithful Brother") or Trú Systir ("True Sister").
- **Trúmaðr (The Devout):** The equivalent of a novice or priest-in-training. They perform small rites, assist with rituals, and study the sacred texts.
- **Hefja (Initiate):** A regular attendee of temple practices. Not part of the clergy, but no longer an ordinary layperson either.
- **Fylgismaðr Trúar (Follower of the Faith):** The common people. They attend temple rites from time to time and follow the traditions of their ancestors, but hold no official role in religious structure.

Additional Characteristics

The religion also exhibits clear influences from ancestor worship, as well as traces of animistic practices. These elements set it apart from the Nordling faith, along with its greater degree of centralization when compared to the more decentralized forms of worship found in the Northern Kingdoms.

Cosmogony

The islanders believe that two primordial forces—also present in the Nordling pantheon under different names—have existed since before time: Boð (Order) and Óreiða (Chaos). These forces dwelled in a formless cosmic void, unaware of one another's existence.

And so it remained for countless eons, until one day the two forces finally collided. From this first clash, the universe was born—though initially it was nothing more than an infinite darkness. From this infinite darkness emerged the first living being, born of pure entropy: Bláinn, the multi-elemental giant. Abandoned by his creators, Bláinn, in his sorrow and solitude, fashioned from his own flesh the first divine beings: Búri and Bestla. These two, in turn, gave birth to their own children—Óðinn, Vili, and Vé.

Time passed once more, until the primordial forces, realizing that neither could triumph through further direct clashes, turned their gaze once again toward the infinite darkness—and thus toward their descendants. They attempted to sway them to their cause for a

renewed and presumably final confrontation. This gave rise to the Fyrsta Stríð (the First War). Its culmination, the Fyrstu Orrostru (First Battle), would reshape existence.

The battle was fought between the allies of Boð—Óðinn and his brothers—and those who sided with Óreiða—Bláinn, Búri, and Bestla. Óðinn and his brothers emerged victorious. From the dead bodies of their grandfather and parents, they shaped the world, for until then they had no home to dwell in.

In gratitude for their loyalty, Boð aided them in creating the rest of the universe, which they structured in the form of a great tree. They imprisoned Óreiða within its roots, to keep chaos from corrupting creation. Yet unknown to them, Óreiða, hidden in the depths, began weaving a realm of its own: Mörhogg. From this cursed land, Óreiða plotted to bring down the great tree, and thus the order in the universe, with the help of its first child born only through herself—Nidhug, the great dragon.

Thus, Chaos became the aggressor, and Order the defender.

Óreiða latter, realizing that her first son alone would not suffice, went on to birth an army of twisted beings: the demons of Mörhogg, who would one day rise in vengeance during the Ragh nar Roog—the final battle between good and evil, to be fought when the tree finally falls and Tedd Deireádh, the end of the world, draws near.

Mythological and Historical Sources

The mythology and history of the Isles are preserved in various sources: sagas, eddas, and the þjóðbóks (“great books”). Since their contact with the Northern Kingdoms, these texts have largely lost their originally oral nature and are now written records.

The differences between them lie mainly in style and purpose:

Sagas are written in prose and may be dedicated to anyone—mythical or historical figures alike. They typically recount specific episodes or periods in the subject’s life.

Eddas are written in verse and are wholly dedicated to the gods, as poetry is believed to be the divine language of the Allfather. This gives them an inherently sacred status.

Þjóðbóks, or great books, are full-length accounts dedicated to clans, individuals, deities, or even exceptional beings and animals (pets or otherwise). While they may include compilations of sagas or eddas, they are mostly original works written in a hybrid style—a unique form that blends elements of poetry and prose into a single continuous voice. In the case of clans or similar entities, they are regularly updated—usually every nine days.

Most Popular Gods

A priest of Svalblod

The most widely venerated gods across the isles are Óðinn, Freya, and various deities of the sea such as Njörðr. Of these, Óðinn and Freya stand above the rest—with Freya often surpassing even Óðinn in devotion due to her less volatile nature. Together, they are revered as Mór Modron (the Greatest Mother) and Uile Thad (the All-Father), respectively.

It is said that in ages past, a great war erupted between the two divine clans, led by Óðinn and Freya. Peace was only achieved when Óðinn gifted Freya the legendary necklace Brísingamen, which held a 150-carat brilliant diamond, and took her as his wife —thus uniting the clans and learning from the errors of his great-grandfather in the primordial past.

Because of this tale, it is customary among Skelliger men to offer a costly gift to their first lover.

Óðinn is especially popular among skalds, who often pray and offer tribute to him in exchange for divine inspiration. He is frequently invoked in times of war or during raids upon the Old Continent.

Tyr also enjoys widespread respect beyond his clan and is typically called upon when internal conflicts between islanders reach an impasse—even after violence has failed to resolve them.

One deity who once held a strong following but has since fallen into oblivion—or rather, collective rejection—is Svalblod, Óðinn's most brutal son. He represented war and violence in their most extreme and inhuman forms. Due to the abhorrent acts of his followers, who sickened even the hardened hearts of the islanders, Svalblod was cast out and forgotten. Today, only a few remember him properly. Most know him only by the name Sá óminnigr (The Forgotten One)

Lesser but Important Deities

Other gods, though of lesser standing, still hold significant importance across the isles. Chief among them is Thor, son of Óðinn, the god of storms. It is said he keeps the cruelty of the remaining elemental giants in check, preventing them from ever reclaiming dominion over the world.

Thor is often at odds with Njörðr, the sea god, due to Njörðr's enduring love for his ex-wife —a giantess. Their conflict is believed to cause the churning seas during storms.

Another such figure is Loki, who exists in a paradoxical state: despised for embodying betrayal, yet revered by many nonetheless. Beyond being the mold from which the elves were shaped, it is said that those favored by Loki will never suffer betrayal. This duality has given rise to a common saying among the islanders: "*May the eye of Loki watch you always.*"

The Ten Realms

The islanders believe that the universe is divided into ten realms, most of which hang from the great cosmic tree like fruit. These realms are said to have been created from the elemental remnants left over after the world itself was shaped—used as nourishing soil to strengthen the roots of the great tree, granting Order a longer resistance against Chaos by making the tree mighty.

These realms are:

1. Loftheimr – The Realm of Air.
2. Jarðheimr – The Realm of Earth.
3. Eldheimr – The Realm of Fire.
4. Vatnsheimr – The Realm of Water.
5. Fúllheimr – The Realm of Rot.
6. Mannheimr – The first realm ever created, the Realm of Man. The center of the universe. The World.
7. Fagrtheimr – The Realm of the Gods.
8. Ljósheimr – The Realm of Light.
9. Jrðheimr – The Subterranean Realm.

10. Óreiðaheimr or Mörhogg – The Realm of Chaos. The second realm ever born. The primal mistake.

The Cult of the Ancestors

Ancestor worship in the isles is most clearly reflected in the deification of the dead. The bravest of men are transformed into nýherjars ("new soldiers")—quasi-deities destined to lead the vanguard of the armies of good during the Ragh nar Roog. The most valiant of women, in turn, become valkyrjas—quasi-deities tasked with guarding the souls of fallen warriors until they reach Fagrtheimr.

Once there, the valkyrjas put them to the test. If deemed worthy, they too are elevated—men becoming nýherjars, women becoming valkyrjas. Those who do not pass the trials still earn their place among the einherjars, the honored dead who will be commanded by Odin and Freya in the final battle before the end of all things.

Value System

The religion of Skellige places a strong emphasis on martial culture—even among women. As such, many types of disputes are resolved through the use of violence. Values such as honor, honesty, courage, respect for one's enemies, and others of a similar kind are held in high regard.

Conversely, traits such as deceit, underhandedness, disrespect, cowardice, and others in that vein are despised.

The culture shaped by these values, unlike most mainland traditions, tends to be far less patriarchal. The islands' lack of resources likely plays a role in this. Even so, men generally still hold slightly more power, due to their natural physical strength.

Belief in Reincarnation

Unlike the people of far-off Melukka, who believe reincarnation is part of a cycle of suffering, the religion of the Isles views it as something inherently positive. According to islander beliefs, when reincarnation occurs, it is either because a soul was clever enough to escape its punishment, or because the Allfather deemed it worthy to return to the world for a multitude of reasons. One of the most commonly cited motives is training—the soul being sent back to hone its spirit and prepare for what lies ahead.

As a result, those believed to be reincarnated are often regarded as significant figures upon their "return." Islanders hold that these individuals will play vital roles in the final battle, much like the main reincarnate, Baldr, who is said in some traditions to be reborn after the end of all things, destined to lead the future new world as the new All-Father.

Sacred Texts

Like many other religions, the faith practiced in Skellige possesses sacred texts. However, as with many aspects of their religion, these texts vary widely from one island or tradition to another. As a result, there is no single definitive book—or set of books—equivalent to those present in Great Sun Religion of the Nilfgaardian Empire.

Nevertheless, this does not mean there is no text regarded as the most important of all. That honor belongs to the Pjóðbók Guðanna ("The Great Book of the Gods")—a massive tome safeguarded by the Sundmaðr. It contains both original writings, in line with its nature as a pjóðbók, as well as a collection of sagas and eddas, all compiled in chronological order. Thus, it narrates the entirety of existence: from the beginning to the end.

The book may occasionally be updated by the Sundmaðr if visions are received. These updates are one of the primary reasons why high priests, druids, or the ruling monarch of the Isles may travel to consult with the Sundmaðr from time to time.

Ceremonies and Prayers

Unlike cults such as that of the Eternal Fire, the Skelliger faith does not follow a strict set of rules regarding how ceremonies and prayers must be performed. High priests and priestesses generally care little for form, as long as the rituals fulfill their purpose.

Though many ceremonies are recorded in sagas, eddas, and þjóðbóks—often serving as the “standard” to follow—each island, and often each community within the island, has developed its own way of conducting them.

Still, most rituals share enough common elements to be clearly recognized as part of the same faith, or the differences are minimal enough not to cause a true doctrinal rift.

Offerings and Rituals

Offerings and rituals vary depending on the deity, the island, and even between settlements on the same island. However, several forms are commonly practiced, such as food offerings, sacrifices (human or otherwise), and self-mutilation offerings. The latter are particularly associated with gods like Tyr and Óðinn, often performed after the resolution of a long-standing conflict or upon returning from war. These offerings are especially prevalent in Óðinn’s name, carried out by warriors who return home after fighting foreign powers—either in gratitude for victory or in supplication for future success, imitating the sacrifice made by the Allfather to obtain power.

A human sacrifice to appease Njörðr

Among the most widespread rituals—regardless of the deity—are purification rites. These are usually performed before entering a temple and often involve immersion in the sea or local hot springs. In the case of hot springs near temples, a small fee is paid, which contributes to the upkeep of the sanctuary.

Other, less frequent but still notable, are dietary rituals. These involve the consumption of a specific food (or foods) for a given period, believed to increase one's chances of gaining divine favor by ingesting something associated with the deity in question. One prominent example is Njörðr and tuna—an animal despised by the god. It is believed that eating tuna pleases Njörðr, as the act eliminates a creature he profoundly loathes.

Funerary Rites

On the isles, two main types of funerary rites are observed. The first resembles the traditional burial under the earth, as practiced by many religions across the Old Continent. However, there are notable differences: the deceased may be buried with numerous belongings—or entirely naked—depending on their deeds and attitude in life. This form of burial is most common among the lower folk.

The second rite—more famous abroad and often assumed to be universal among the islanders—involves placing the body on a boat or drakkar laden with offerings, which is then set ablaze after setting sail. While commonly associated with nobility, this rite is not unheard of among commoners, provided the deceased was deemed truly exceptional.

Islanders believe that, upon death, the soul journeys to one of the ten worlds that make up the universe-tree. Those who led undignified lives are cast into Fúllheimr, the Rancid Realm. The worthy, however, may reach Fagrtheimr, the Fair Realm—home to their ancestors and the gods.

To arrive there, the soul must first travel to the end of the world, where Hräsvelg, the winged giant and father of the nixas, dwells. There, the spirit must resist the temptations of his daughters. Should it succeed, Hräsvelg will use his wings to propel the soul across the Bïfrost, so it may reach its destined realm.

But those who fail the test are doomed to return and haunt the living—punishment for the living's failure to properly prepare them for the journey beyond.

Religious Taboos

Just like offerings and rituals, religious taboos vary between islands and even among communities within each island. However, certain taboos are universally recognized across the Isles. These are believed to bring misfortune or even divine curses upon the person who violates them—though the severity of the consequences may vary depending on the offender’s age.

Some of the most notable taboos include: breaking promises, cowardice, offending one’s ancestors, failing to purify oneself before entering a temple, spilling blood within sacred grounds, disrespecting priests or elders, entering a temple while ill, misreading sacred texts, and interrupting an ongoing ritual.

Social Taboos Derived from Religion

The primary social taboo derived from religion is the already mentioned concept of cowardice in its various forms. The most serious transgression is fleeing from battle. Such an act may lead to the individual being stripped of their name and, whether dead or alive, erased from the Bók Forfeðranna (“Book of the Ancestors”) kept by each community. If still alive, the person is exiled; if deceased, they are buried in an unmarked grave.

Another major taboo rooted in religious belief is incest. Once tolerated in cases of second cousins and beyond, it became increasingly condemned after the collective rejection of Svalblod—the already mentioned violent god of war, said in mythology to be the incestuous son of Óðinn himself. This shift in attitude led to a social solution among the warrior and noble castes: the acceptance of concubines, known as haftré (“sea trees”), provided the wife granted her consent. Most haftré were typically taken as thralls during raids, and their presence helped prevent consanguineous unions within elite bloodlines.

Perception of Non-Humans Due to Religion

Although significantly less racist than their continental counterparts, the islanders—shaped by the value system instilled by their faith—still display a degree of discrimination toward non-humans, much like many human communities along the western coast (with

the exception of a certain southern empire). Among these groups, dwarves face the least prejudice, as they are seen to share a relatively similar mindset, and some mythological dwarves have played key roles in sacred tales.

Elves, however, bear the brunt of such discrimination—though not as severely as in the duchy of Nyrvinland, founded by Skelliger settlers. This bias stems not only from their mythological origins—as elves are believed to be indirectly descended from Loki, who served as the divine template for their creation—but also from historical factors. When humans first arrived in Skellige, the isles were already inhabited by Aen Seidhe elves, who shared the land with giants and ice giants.

Given the absence of giants on the isles for centuries, scholars suggest that at some point there was an elven-human alliance (which would explain why Skelliger Jargon derives from Elder Speech) formed to drive the giants to extinction. However, it is believed that the Aen Seidhe betrayed the humans afterward, leading to renewed conflict and their eventual expulsion or extermination from the islands.

Due to the islander discrimination toward the elves many reject the idea that Skelliger humans could be descended from elves—as is the case for the Nilfgaardians of Lower Alba, the founding core of the Empire.

List of Skelliger Gods

Primordial Gods (Frumvættir)

- **The Primordial Parents**: Boð (Order) and Óreiða (Chaos)
- **The Progenitor**: Bláinn, the multi-elemental giant born from pure entropy.
- **The First Brother**: Nörr, the endless darkness of the cosmos made flesh.
- **The Three Sisters**: Daughters of Boð, in the same way, Óreiða birth Nidhug, they are the Norns, the rulers of fate, Urðr, Verðandi y Skuld.
- **The Parents**: Búri and Bestla, children of Bláinn, progenitors of the first divine lineage.
- **The First Beast**: Nidhug, the progenitor of all dragons. Son of Óreiða.

The Firstborn (Fyrstuborinn)

- **Óðinn**: Allfather, ruler of the skies.
- **Vili**: Ruler of the primeval land.
- **Vé**: Ruler of the primeval ocean.

Together, Óðinn, Vili, and Vé created the three first mortal races in search of perfection: Elves, too arrogant. Dwarves, too greedy. Humans, the perfect balance between virtues and flaws.

The Progenitors of the Great Clans of Gods

- **Óðinn**: Father of the Æsir. Through the first inhabitants of the world—the elemental giants who, like worms in a corpse, emerged from the remains used to forge the world and the universe—he fathered the Æsir. The gods of light and wisdom.
- **Nótt**: Daughter of Nörr, brought forth in the same manner her brother birthed his offspring. She became the mother of the Vanir through the same means Odin used to sire the Æsir. Thus creating the gods of nature.

The Legendary Ancestors (Þjóðforfeðr)

- **Hemdall**: Son of Óðinn (and according to some tales, either the lover or son of Freya), Hemdall is the slumbering guardian of Skellige and the Bifröst. He shall awaken when the legendary golden rooster Kambi crows three times, marking the beginning of the Last Battle.
- **Heulyn**: The first human woman, mother of the forebears. Wife of Hemdall and bearer of his children.
- **Tyr**: One of the first demigods alongside his brothers. Founder of Clan Tuirseach. His courage was so great that after slaying Yngvar, the legendary bear that once threatened the isle of An Skellig, he earned Óðinn's eternal respect. Upon his death, Óðinn elevated him to godhood—naming him the god of war and law.

Symbols

Although the Skelliger faith is more centralized than the Nordling religion, it does not possess a single, unified symbol. Instead, each deity is associated with their own set of sigils and sacred emblems.

Nevertheless, a few symbols have gained widespread prominence across the archipelago.

One such symbol is the golden rooster Kambi, whose, as mentioned before, crow is said to herald the awakening of Hemdall and the coming of the Ragh nar Roog. Kambi is commonly found engraved or painted on all manner of objects—jewelry, shields, ship prows, even on priestly garments—regardless of the specific deity being worshipped. Its presence is believed to ward off premature doom and remind the faithful to remain vigilant.

Another widely revered emblem is that of the Four Ravens of the Allfather. Traditionally invoked in times of war, especially when the clans unite against an external threat, these four ravens—Huginn (Thought), Munin (Memory), Innsýn (Insight), and Tilkváma (Action)—are often depicted as a single, four-headed raven, representing the unification of all key aspects of the mind into one overwhelming force. This symbol is particularly favored by skalds, battle-priests, and war-chiefs who seek clarity, strategy, and ferocity in equal measure.

Sacred Animals

As with many polytheistic religions, the faith of the Isles features a pantheon of sacred animals. Ranked from greatest to least significance, these are ravens, roosters, hawks, cats, and—lastly—seals. Each of them is associated with a specific deity: ravens with the Allfather; roosters with Kambi; hawks and cats with Freya; and seals with Njörðr, as they are said to have rescued shipwrecked sailors on more than one occasion—a gesture widely interpreted as divine intervention.

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